



**Watertown City Council  
Committee on Rules and Ordinances  
Monday, March 16, 2026  
Third Floor Conference Room  
5:30pm**

Members Present: Councilor Nicole Gardner, Chair; Councilor Lisa Feltner, Vice Chair; and Councilor John Gannon, Secretary

Also present: Doug Newton, City Council Municipal Policy Analyst; John Labadini; Mia Kanin, Assistant Sustainability Manager, Community Development and Planning Department (by zoom)

Call to Order. Committee Chair Gardiner called the meeting to order at 5:30pm and introduced the other committee members present. The meeting agenda read as follows:

A. Confirm the Reappointment of John Labadini as member of the Licensing Board to a term expiring February 15, 2029; and

B. Continued Discussion on a Draft Ordinance Relative to Food and Beverage Single Use Items - "Skip the Stuff."

A. Interview of John Labadini.

John Labadini grew up in Watertown and currently resides in the west end of Town. John's background is in the restaurant business, and he has experience in compliance and regulations of the restaurant industry. He feels that his experience in the industry complements his role as a member of the Licensing Board. He feels that a restaurant operator should be aware of all the laws and regulations pertaining to restaurants operations prior to opening their restaurant. He provided insight to committee members on the licenses issued by the Board, his belief in the fair resolution of violations, his support for an expedited procedure for one-day liquor permits to facilitate cultural and festive events and offered support for a process to facilitate musical performances in licensed establishments.

**Action Item:** Councilor Gannon made a motion to confirm the reappointment of John Labadini as member of the Licensing Board to a term expiring February 15, 2029, which was seconded by Council Feltner. The vote on the motion was 3-0 in favor.

B. "Skip the Stuff" Ordinance Discussion

The committee next took up a referral from the City Council to discuss the impact of the Skip the Stuff ordinance on individuals with disabilities. As background for this referral, at the City Council meeting of February 24, 2026, City Council President Mark Sideris informed the

Council that he had received earlier that day a letter from Kim Charlson, Chair, Watertown Commission on Disabilities. In the letter, Chair Carlson expressed the Commission's concerns regarding the impact that implementation of the Skip the Stuff ordinance would have with respect to the particular needs of individuals with disabilities. City Council President Sideris referred the draft Skip the Stuff ordinance back to the Committee on Rules and Ordinances for further discussion of the issues addressed by the Commission on Disabilities.

The committee discussed issues raised by the February 24, 2026, letter from the Commission on Disabilities, a copy of which is attached to these meeting minutes. In the letter, the Commission requested a friendly amendment to the Skip the Stuff ordinance to recognize the safety concerns for individuals with disabilities of eliminating the automatic inclusion of certain utensils with take-out orders by food services establishments. The letter also sought to include clarifying language to allow a server's discretion to speak with a consumer about utensil needs without placing the onus of the consumer to request them. The letter explained that providing such accommodations would promote the dignity, independence, and safety of individuals with disabilities by reducing reliance on caregivers.

Councilor Gardner stated that prior to this meeting, she spoke with Chair Carlson about the Commission's suggested changes to the ordinance. Councilor Gardner stated that she asked Chair Carlson whether restaurant staff training to address the specific food service utensil needs of individuals with disabilities would address the Commission's concerns. She further shared Chair Carlson's opinion that providing restaurant staff training on individualized food service utensil inclusion would address those concerns.

Mia Kanin, Assistant Sustainability Manager, Community Development and Planning Department, addressed the committee on the matter. She stated that the training on individualized approaches to fulfilling take-out orders to address the Commission's concerns would be provided not only to restaurant staff but also to patrons. Councilor Gardner stated that the sustainability staff should appear before the Committee in the future to discuss training procedures and materials to be used prior to the training of restaurant workers and patrons. Mia Kanin, assistant sustainability manager, stated that the staff already has training materials prepared.

**Action Item:** Councilor Feltner made a motion, seconded by Councilor Gannon, that the sustainability staff appear at a meeting of the Committee on Rules and Ordinances to discuss training procedures and materials prior to the training of restaurant workers and patrons. The motion passed by a vote of 3-0.

The Committee then discussed whether the Skip the Stuff ordinance needed to be amended to encompass the Commission's concerns. Councilor Feltner made a motion to amend the Skip the Stuff Ordinance to address the Commission's concerns. There was no second of the motion made, so the motion did not go forward for a vote.

**Action Item:** Councilor Feltner made a motion to refer back to the City Council for adoption the Skip the Stuff Ordinance as initially recommended to the City Council, which was seconded by Councilor Gannon. The motion passed by a vote of 2 Yes (Gannon, Gardner) – 0 – 1 Present (Feltner).

Councilor Feltner made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councilor Gannon. The motion passed by a vote of 3-0.

The meeting ended at 7:03pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
John Gannon

(Attachment – Letter dated February 24, 2026 from Commission on Disabilities to City Council)

Summary of Action Items:

**Action Item:** Councilor Gannon made a motion to confirm the reappointment of John Labadini as member of the Licensing Board to a term expiring February 15, 2029, which was seconded by Council Feltner. The vote on the motion was 3-0 in favor.

**Action Item:** Councilor Feltner made a motion, seconded by Councilor Gannon, that the sustainability staff appear at a meeting of the Committee on Rules and Ordinances to discuss training procedures and materials prior to the training of restaurant workers and patrons. The motion passed by a vote of 3-0.

**Action Item:** Councilor Feltner made a motion to refer back to the City Council for adoption the Skip the Stuff Ordinance as initially recommended to the City Council, which was seconded by Councilor Gannon. The motion passed by a vote of 2-0-1.

**ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Nicole Gardner,  
Chair

Lisa J. Feltner  
Vice Chair

John G. Gannon,  
Secretary

**WHEREAS**, Implementing Watertown’s “Resilient Watertown” Climate Plan is a top priority of the City Council and the Community; and,

**WHEREAS**, a part of the effort to improve the environment is to reduce waste and,

**WHEREAS**, single use plastics have a significant impact on the environment through their carbon footprint and contribution to excess waste; and,

**WHEREAS**, the reduction of single use plastics in circumstances where they are not necessary is a valid and effective waste reduction strategy; and,

**WHEREAS**, substitution of reusable materials for non-recyclable single-use plastics will also reduce waste.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED** by the City Council of the City of Watertown that the Watertown Code of Ordinances is hereby amended by adding new Title XI, Chapter 118, entitled “Skip the Stuff”, as follows:

## Chapter 118

### SKIP THE STUFF

#### 118.1 Purpose

The ordinance is to reduce the overall environmental impact of the City of Watertown, its residents, and its businesses. Single use plastic has a significant impact on the environment through its carbon footprint, and impact on waste systems. The provisions of this Ordinance will reduce the amount of single use plastic used throughout the City.

#### 118.2 Definitions

For the purpose of this Section 118, the following definitions apply:

A. **Condiment:** A single-use packet containing relishes, spices, sauces, confections, or seasonings, and similar ingredients, that requires no additional preparation, and that is used on food or beverages, including, but not limited to, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, soy sauce, sauerkraut, salsa, syrup, jam, jelly, salad dressings, salt, sugar, sugar substitutes, pepper, and chili pepper.

B. **Food Establishment:** A retail establishment that stores, prepares, services, vends, or otherwise provides food for human consumption, including, but not limited to, any establishment requiring a permit to operate in accordance with the State Sanitary Code Chapter X- Minimum Sanitation Standards for Food Establishments, 105 CMR 590 (the Retail Food Code), as it may be amended from time to time.

C. **Full-Service Food Establishment:** A food establishment where customers are seated at a table and where orders are taken and served by waitstaff at the tables.

D. **Online Food Ordering Platform:** The digital technology provided on a website or mobile application through which a consumer can place an order for pick-up or delivery of Prepared Food. Such

platforms include those operated directly by Food Establishments, by companies that provide delivery of prepared meals to consumers, and by online food ordering systems that connect consumers to Food Establishments directly.

E. **Prepared Food:** Food or beverages serviced, packaged, cooked, chopped, sliced, mixed, brewed, frozen, squeezed, poured, or otherwise prepared (collectively “prepared”) for individual customers or consumers. Prepared Food does not include raw eggs or raw, butchered meats, fish, and/or poultry sold from a butcher case, a refrigerator case, or similar retail appliance.

F. **Single-Use:** Items designed to be used once and then discarded and not designed for repeated use and sanitizing.

G. **Single-Use Foodware Accessory:** Single-use items provided alongside Prepared Food served in single-use plates, containers, or cups, including but not limited to utensils as defined herein, tongs, chopsticks, straws, stirrers, splash sticks, cocktail sticks, and toothpicks, cup sleeves, cup trays, and food trays.

H. **Utensil:** Forks, spoons, knives, sporks, chopsticks, or other instruments used to serve food or to eat food.

I. **Reusable Food and Beverage Serviceware:** Containers, bowls, plates, trays, cups, glasses, utensils, takeout containers, and other items used to contain and consume beverages and prepared food that are manufactured and designed to be washed and sanitized and used repeatedly over an extended period of time.

### **118.3 Prohibited use and distribution of single-use food and beverage serviceware.**

Food Establishments are prohibited from providing Single-Use Foodware Accessories, including in takeout and delivery orders, whether orders are placed online, via phone, or in person, except as follows:

- A. Single-Use Foodware Accessories may be provided specifically upon the request of the consumer:
  - By asking directly;
  - By selecting the items in an online food ordering platform; or,
  - In response to an inquiry by the food establishment.
- B. Single-Use Foodware Accessories, including plastic Utensils, may not be wrapped in plastic or offered as bundled sets.
- C. Food Establishments may have Single-Use Foodware Accessories available at self-service stations. The self-service station may include a Single Item Dispenser. These stations must comply with the Massachusetts Retail Food Code (105 CMR 590.00).

#### **118.4 Options with Online Food Ordering Platforms**

Online Food Ordering Platforms must provide Food Establishments with a method to list each Single-Use Foodware Accessory and Condiment that is offered by the Food Establishment, such that customers can specifically request the Single-Use Accessories and Condiments that they wish to have included with their order.

#### **118.5 Restrictions on Full Service Food**

Full Service Food Establishments must utilize only Reusable Food and Beverage Serviceware for dine-in customers.

#### **118.6 Exemptions**

A. Food Establishment may seek an exemption from the requirements of this Ordinance as follows:

- The Food Establishment must file a request for an exemption in writing with the Director of Public Health.
- The request must state specifically which section and products they are seeking an exemption from and state reasons why application of the specific requirement would cause undue hardship.
- The Director may waive any specific requirement of this Ordinance for a period of not more than six months, but, upon subsequent applications, may extend exemptions for an additional six-month period.
- The Director will issue a final decision in writing within 30 days of receipt of a written request for an exemption.

#### **118.7 Enforcement**

The Director of Public Health and/or his/her designee shall have the authority to administer and enforce this Ordinance. This Ordinance and any resulting rules and regulations may be enforced through any lawful means in law or in equity, including, but not limited to, non-criminal disposition in accordance with the provisions of G.L. c. 40, §21D pursuant to Chapter 35, § 35.05 of the City Code of Ordinances.

#### **118.8 Effective Date**

This Ordinance will take effect six months after passage to allow time for the City Administration to conduct an education campaign focused on food establishments and consumers.

### **118.9 Penalty**

A. Any person who violates any provision of this Ordinance shall be issued a verbal and written warning for the first two offenses, then fined as follows:

- \$50 for the third offense
- \$100 for the fourth offense
- \$200 for the fifth offense and each subsequent offense

B. Each day the violation continues may constitute a separate offense.

C. Nothing in this section shall be deemed to limit the use of other lawful methods of abating violations of this section, including but not limited to application for equitable relief from a court of law.

February 24, 2026 via email

To the Honorable City Council,

I write on behalf of the Commission on Disability to request that the City Council consider a friendly amendment to the draft “Skip the Stuff” ordinance. While we greatly appreciate Watertown’s continuing efforts to reduce waste and harmful impacts from single-use plastics on our community's environment, there are two main reasons for our amendment: (1) Some of the items not exempt but included in section 118.2 G. Single-Use Foodware Accessory provide safety benefits, particularly to our disability and special needs community (see summary below); and (2) Clarifying language easily identifies a server’s ability to make accommodations and supports a more inclusive customer-friendly approach, that items may be provided without *solely* placing the onus on the consumer.

The proposed language is consistent with bills considered at the state house and in other communities, such as Lexington. Rather than modifying the list of accessory items or calling out exceptions for the disability community, please consider adding the following text to section 118.3 Prohibited use and distribution of single-use food and beverage serviceware:

Food service providers may ask if the consumer wants Single-Use Foodware Accessory item(s) to prevent spills of or to safely transport ready-to-eat food and beverage(s).

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration,

Chair Kim Charlson, Commission on Disability

Summary for how some Single-Use Foodware Accessory items are beneficial

Cup and container lids, sleeves, and splash sticks or spill plugs are low-cost aids that promote independence, safety, and dignity for blind individuals and those with disabilities, tremors, dexterity issues, or limited motor coordination. They prevent dangerous spills and enable independent consumption of hot or cold liquids, while reducing the anxiety and stress often associated with potential accidents. Most cup sleeves are crafted from eco-friendly materials, improve grip, protect hands, and eliminate the need to double-cup. Overall, these tools also increase confidence and independence by reducing the reliance on caregivers.